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NOV 1 2

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Research Memorandum DEPARTMENT OF STATE

PAR-39, October 30, 1962

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

REVIEWED by

DATE 4-6-88

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The crisis over the Soviet missile buildup in Cuba placed a clear choice before Latin Americans. This paper examines their reactions to that choice, and the effect on the Castro/Communists in the area.

ABSTRACT

The missile crisis and its aftermath may have a tonic effect on Latin American national politics by (1) indicating that the victory of the Russian-backed Castro movement is not inevitable, and (2) thus helping to dispell fears discouraging action on Alliance for Progress reforms in the area. Recriminations among the communists and Castroists in the area can be expected. Granted these losses, the Soviets and their local allies continue to have a territorial base in the hemisphere which they can almost certainly retain and use to extend their operations as long as Castro is head of the Cuban government.

A Clear Choice Forced

For the first time, Latin Americans have been forced to decide between supporting the US or the USSR on an issue which would clearly alter the existing status of the hemisphere. The overwhelmingly affirmative Latin American response owed much to US swiftness and firmness in quarantining Cuba and demanding removal of the missiles, although the Soviet retreat, coming as it did within days of the US action, spared Latin American governments the painful dilemma of endorsing or failing to endorse an actual US intervention in Cuba, up to and including a full-scale invasion. The fast pace of developments also forestalled the growth of any significant movement for appeasement.

Political Side Effects

Aside from its effect on the timing or substance of the Khrushchev response, OAS unanimity against the Soviet intervention may have a significant carryback into national political life. In many countries the effect of the Castro/communist model in Cuba has been seen in the forward push of the revolutionary left, the almost stalemated position of moderate reformers,

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and a prevailing inertia or panic among ruling groups. In any case, the Castro specter would have become less terrifying -- or inspiring -- with the Soviet undertaking to remove the missile bases from Cuba. However, the demonstration of OAS unanimity in support of strong US action against the Soviet intrusion, and the lack of significant Castro/communist reprisals, except in Venezuela, has doubtless helped, with the success achieved, to free many Latin American leaders from nagging fears of leftist attack. This demonstration should go far to check the growth of defeatist attitudes toward the "inevitable" Marxist-style social revolution that Castro has come to embody. With unprecedented agreement for action to contain Russian intervention and growing involvement in goals set for the hemisphere by the Alliance for Progress, the governments can also draw increasing strength from action in support of common objectives.

Capitalizing on the effects of the crisis and realizing the possibilities now offered may be more difficult, and confidence based on a unified front may be dissipated, if a movement to "normalize" US-Cuban relations is permitted to gain headway. The missile crisis, cutting through the fictions and complexities of the Cuban case, has tended to draw the issue between the US and the USSR on the one hand and between Cuba and the other Latin Americans on the other. The movement to support "normalization" has its chief impetus from the Brazilian government, which proposes to inject itself into the negotiations as a mediator between Cuba and the United States.

Brazil's interest in taking a role in the negotiations is doubtless increased by the fact that President Goulart's equivocation on agreed hemisphere strategy in the OAS and on the national political scene has probably weakened his political position in the country, at least temporarily. Since during the crisis he failed to assume a decisive position on the most important hemispheric issue of all time, he is now seeking to gain the spotlight by adopting a mediatory role in negotiations between the interested parties. He will have one eye to the plebiscite scheduled for January 6, 1963, to pass on returning full powers to the presidency and scrapping present parliamentary arrangements.

Aftermath for Castro/communism

The Castro regime, with a guarantee against invasion, remains a model, however damaged, for winning "independence" in the hemisphere through Soviet backing. Regardless of its difficulties and isolation, it has continuing value to the revolutionary left as a Soviet territorial base in the hemisphere. As a medium of material support, a training center for guerrillas, and a source of subversive propaganda in the hemisphere, it still has much to offer, assuming continued economic distress and political turmoil in Latin America. As the present crisis recedes into history, pro-Castro/communist groups can hope to recoup their losses. For example, voters in Venezuela, Guatemala, and Chile may be confronted by parties in presidential elections scheduled for 1963 and 1964 which offer the Soviet way to "independence".

Even though an asset to the Soviets, Castro should be far less able to

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convey a sense of forward movement than in the past several years, especially if reformist leaders in some of the other Latin American countries develop their own strategies for progress and can demonstrate some success. In the process, currents of moderate centrist opinion are sure to gain increasing strength as groups that tend to collaborate with the extreme left feel the impact of the missile crisis and detach to seek new alliances at the center. For while the recent crisis has not shaken out Castro in Cuba, it has, as noted above, doubtless dispelled much of the fearful belief in the unchecked progress of the revolutionary left that has been a main Castro contribution to the Soviet advance in Latin America.

Communist and pro-communist groups were caught off guard by the speed and determination shown in US action and OAS support. They encountered much difficulty in organizing displays of popular protest. In many places, communist groups were inhibited from taking any action whatever by the fear that popular resentment against the missile buildup might result in reprisals against themselves. Unprepared by Moscow and unsure just what the final Soviet position would be, most communist groups found it impossible to formulate plans for exploiting the situation. Only in Bolivia, Argentina, and Uruguay were there sizeable demonstrations. However, the Cuban radio has reportedly urged Castro/communist groups to step up sabotage in other countries, specifically by calling for an insurrection in Honduras and for acts of terrorism against US property and persons in Venezuela. The October 27 bombing of a US-owned petroleum installation at Maracaibo was probably in response to this appeal.

Although much depends upon the success of Castro and Moscow in salvaging concessions and saving face, the effect of the missile crisis on the communist movement in the area will probably be severe. The Castro/communist alliance has given the local parties a greater self-confidence and militancy than ever before in the postwar period, much of which has rested upon the conviction that the USSR could extend its operations in the hemisphere with relative impunity. Prior to the missile crisis, Cuba stood in contrast to the Guatemalan case, demonstrating as it did to the Communists of the hemisphere the unwillingness of the United States to act unilaterally to put an end to an openly Communist regime. Convinced that there was little or no danger of unified OAS backing to a resolute US policy, the Latin American communists also gained confidence from the arms buildup in Cuba, which strengthened their conviction that they would receive all necessary Soviet support should they attain power. Thus the firmness of the US position, the unanimity of Latin American diplomatic support, and perhaps above all the backdown by Khrushchev came as a very real jolt to the several communist parties -- particularly to the more active and militant. Moreover, the disorientation and ineffectiveness shown by party leaders will give dissident elements more fuel for intra-party fires.

The developments of the past two weeks are likely to have a profound effect upon relations between the communist parties and other elements of the revolutionary left. More than the orthodox communist parties, revolutionary extremists such as Brazilian peasant leader Francisco Juliao will

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probably react to Moscow's letting Castro down by turning increasingly toward Communist China as their source of inspiration. Ultranationalists who are fundamentally anti-US rather than pro-Soviet have been alienated by the intrusion of offensive missiles into the hemisphere and impressed by the firm, but reasonable position adopted by the United States. These elements will be increasingly uncomfortable sharing political isolation with the communists and may lean instead toward cooperation with moderate leftist nationalist elements who have opted for, or may now incline toward, collaboration with centrist groups in support of the Alliance for Progress. Thus the problems of the communists in maintaining effective leftist coalitions will certainly be aggravated by this crisis. The reaction of the Chilean Socialists, now allied with the Communists in a political front, will be particularly significant in this respect.

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